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Research Stipend Proposal - Summer 2007

My research goal for the 2007 summer break is to produce two nearly complete full chapters of my dissertation in addition to my already completed work. My dissertation topic is Mental Causation, a subfield in Philosophy of Mind that deals with the potential problems raised by the claim that the mind (or mental properties or events), is causally efficacious in bringing about subsequent effects. Specifically within the topic of mental causation I am working on a problem raised by Jaegwon Kim known as the "Problem of Causal Exclusion." According to Kim, there is a tension between the views that mental properties have causal powers and that all physical effects are explainable by invoking only physical causes. In Kim's language, there is no more "Causal Work" to be done by mental properties that is not already being done by physical properties. My dissertation research has focused on the Problem of Causal Exclusion and a number of recent arguments in related literature that attempt to argue against Jaegwon Kim's reasoning in that problem.

My initial work on this topic focused on the work of Karen Bennett, who has given what I believe to be a flawed but fruitful answer to the Problem of Causal Exclusion. Following an initial dissertation chapter in which I will lay out in detail the Problem of Causal Exclusion and its motivating assumptions, I will dedicate a chapter to Bennett's proposed solution to the problem and show why I believe it ultimately fails. My research up to that point in the dissertation is fairly well complete and one goal for the summer is to get these first two chapters nearer to completion.

In addition to the above initial chapters, I have recently been continuing my research on various strategies for retaining the viability of mental causation. My most recent work has focused on a response to Kim offered by Larry Shapiro and Elliott Sober, who argue that the Problem of Causal Exclusion Problem rests on a faulty assumption that can be overcome by appealing to alternative theories of causation. Kim has argued that the Exclusion Problem does not rest on which theory of causation is adopted, so I believe I have discovered a fundamental tension between Kim's reasoning and the reasoning of his deepest critics. My work over the Winter 2007 quarter has centered on learning more about the relevant theories of causation and the role that those theories might play in thinking about mental causation. I do not have immediate sympathies with the manipulationist account of causation that Shapiro and Sober advocate, and I am in the process of formulating my objections that will show that their response to Kim is not adequate to overcome the Problem of Causal Exclusion.

My goal for my summer research is to take this preliminary work on theories of causation and their role in the mental causation debate and write two nearly complete dissertation chapters that will follow the

initial chapters described above. One chapter will consist of my reply to the response to Kim offered by Shapiro and Sober. The second chapter will consist of broader reflections on the role that various views of causation might play in thinking about mental causation in general and the Problem of Causal Exclusion Problem in general. A fifth chapter, in addition to the four already described, on overdetermination will likely follow in turn; but I believe two chapters based on my recent work of the last several months to be a reasonable goal for the summer.